THE HEART OF NIGHT WIND

A STORY OF THE GREAT NORTH WEST

By VINGIE E. ROE

ILLUSTRATIONS by RAY WALTERS

And, turning swiftly, she went down the slope, away from him, leaving him as she had done once before with his head whirling under the spell of her beauty and her daring. But this time she had left far more, for within him there surged and rioted emotions that defied control—joy and triumph and savage desire to even scores with the man who had so cruelly pressed him, relief at the prospect of saving so easily his East Belt and his future; and, bursting through the rest, the tingle of her words, the amazed comprehension of them.

The days that followed were hard ones for the young owner of the Dillingworth. He did not see that he had taken the silent little girl of the hills, and that the dominant, clever woman of the world had taken him. Yet such were the facts in the vague, half-formed shape that affairs had assumed.

With a splendid tact Miss Ordway kept away from him, presenting at such times as they chanced to meet a serene poise that was as charming as her abandon had been that night by the rollway. On the other hand, Siletz watched him with troubled eyes. There was that in features and voice that frightened her, as a loving woman is ever frightened when trouble rides the shoulder of the beloved.

Therefore one night soon after Sandry's talk with Miss Ordway, Siletz followed him as he went to the office after supper. It was a black night, and Sandry was not aware of her presence until a touch fell on his shoulder, almost as light and soft as that of the mist upon his face.

"Sandry," said Siletz.

He turned swiftly and all the vexatious ache of his heart seemed to culminate suddenly in a desire to take her in his arms.

"Yes?" he said, yielding to the influence of the misty darkness and the nearness of this girl who typified the wild so alluringly, "the Night Wind breathes upon my heart. Why is it, Little S'letz?"

"Why—why," stammered Siletz, "I hardly know. Yet—there is something."

She fell silent a moment, standing beside him.

"The winds of God are heavy on my soul, Sandry," she said at last, earnestly, "and they tell me that you are sad. What can I do—oh, what can I do to help?"

There was in her voice the simple cry of a sympathy so intense that it was anguish, and Sandry's lips tightened in the darkness.

For a heady moment he could scarce resist the bidding of the lawless thrill that she was ever capable of sending through him, to take her into his arms as he had done that day when she beheld the sea. But a tardy thought of Miss Ordway shut his hands upon themselves and steadied his voice.

He put his hands upon her shoulders and turned her round.

"Go back to Ma Daily, child," he said, but his voice had fallen to a whisper, a whisper that was a caress laden as heavily with wistful sadness as a whisper might be, "and don't fret. I am all right."

Without a word, obedient to him as the primal woman ever is to man, Siletz went away in the night toward the cook-shack.

As she passed up the path she almost brushed the garments of Poppy Ordway, standing in rigid silence, her hands shut in the folds of her gown, her rose lips ashen, her eyes strained wide.

"Fool! Fool! Fool!" the woman was thinking in a rage of passion. "Why didn't I suspect? She is something to him—she has her charm. There is danger in her to me—oh, Sandry, you stupid, simple heart!" For Poppy Ordway had heard the caress of that lowered voice. The new passion in her took fright, and a furious, choking rage sent the blood hot upon her heart.

The next morning he found upon his window-ledge a handful of fern and a spray of tiny, yellow, waxlike flowers that were beginning to show where the little streams tore down the mountains, lining their rocky beds. He took them in and put them away in a drawer among his papers, silent voice of a sympathy that was as delicate as it was strong.

That morning when Poppy Ordway encountered Siletz the bright smile she gave her covered a sudden hatred that had sprung, full grown, from a man's low whisper; and the bad times that followed for the girl had their inception then.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Big Raft.

On the fourteenth of March the wheezy tug pulled the great, brown cigar-shaped monster that meant so much to Sandry and the fortunes of the Dillingworth from its moorings out to the narrow, deep neck of the bay that would take it to the sea. Sandry for the first time in his life felt the slow, sliding motion as the great oval floor responded to the screeching tug and the ebb tide.

On board with Sandry were Daily and eight Indians, all armed and waiting for anything that might develop. But Hampden had no notion of meeting John Daily in his present mood and it seemed as if all was to go smoothly. As the raft drew majestically abreast of the mill at Toledo the Yellow Pines owner was conspicuous on the dock, though he did not appear to see anything beyond the pile of raw, bright lumber he was marking. His florid face wore a sardonic grin.

"Wait till yer damned little gasoline bobtail gets down to th' water!" he said under his breath, "jest wait!"

And just as the raft swung slowly into the straight canallike mouth of the bay, which it almost filled, the little tug faltered, coughed, sent up a protesting flutter and was dead as death.

The Portland scaler was running it, and he spent two blasphemous hours alternately working at the engine and shouting to the men on the raft.

"It's a mighty good thing we got her headed out before this happened," said Daily, "or we'd never a-got her turned straight in God's world. I bet Hampden's done somethin' to th' tug. She hain't never gone dead before."

As the strong outrunning tide drew them along the little town receded, the low banks gave way to the trees, and the hills rose sharply about them, ending, as the waterway cut through the ridges.

Sandry saw what an ideal holding the Dillingworth was, with its unbounded revenue of forest, its deep natural harbor, its strong tide suction for the rafts.

The scaler loosed his useless cable, worked the drifting tug to the side with a couple of heavy paddles, finally edged her clear, lassoed a passing snag and let the raft go by.

"Tell them I'll be up by train tomorrow," he called, "and I'll send someone down for the tug with a dray."

"John," said Sandry, "it's a wonder Hampden didn't do something surer to hinder us—jam the bay with logs or tie us up some way."

"Might, only I've had John Teeterpole an' Klamath Sam walkin' th' shores fer five days—an' they're the two worst Siwashes on th' reservation. Hampden knows they're workin' fer S'letz, an' that when I said shoot or cut they'd shoot or cut—ef it took four years an' a dark night to do it."

That first day drifted by very swiftly, soft and sunny between showers, and by four o'clock the ebb of the tide, grown slower and slower, had ceased altogether. Daily and the rest tied up the raft, head and tail on both sides, using heavy steel ropes and chains, to which they gave plenty of slack. They cooked supper ashore and Sandry thought he had never tasted better fare. Afterward they lay about the fire all together, smoking, and only the silence of the Siletz marked the line of color. Triumph filled the heart of the young financier and his last drowsy thoughts were of the steamer that was even now plowing down from Portland to meet them, the huge check that would follow his delivery of the logs—how he would lift a certain mortgage of the load that hung upon the Dillingworth, its greatest menace in point of time.

He waked to see the heavy chains drawn taut, to hear the mass of timbers creaking and grumbling as it strained upstream, and knew that the tide was in. The Siwash cook waked the men by moonlight for breakfast. They must be ready to take advantage of the first motion toward the sea.

The casting loose, the slow start, the moving of the night shores—Sandry wished Miss Ordway might see it—it might be a bit of local color in the mysterious book she was writing in the little south room. His mind went over that little room. He saw the stand with the ancient Bible. He shuddered a bit with the night chill as he saw again the words, "Oh, Absalom! My son, my son!"

Those were the last words that the mind of the Easterner were to know for many days. The nose of the raft where he was standing suddenly rose under him like a thing of life. The night opened, flame shot upward from the dark waters, immeasurable sound smote his eardrums to silence, pain that was unendurable stretched and tore his limbs. He sailed away into night and the world was not.

When the thing was over John Daily picked himself up from where he had been blown clear of the raft and the water, landing in a tangle of blueberry vines, and screamed a curse at the serene heavens.

"Oh, God damn his soul to hell!" he cried, half after the manner of a prayer; "he's blowed her up at last!"

In the awful silence that fell in the first moments there set up a great groaning of the timbers. The wrecked and opened prow of the raft slewed to the right, jammed into the shore, and was holding the rest, while the strong tide urged it hard upon itself.

Above it Daily lifted his voice and called his Indians, and there was anguish in his heart.

"Koottah! Snamishta! Memmiloo!"

From here and there voices answered, some far, some near, and pres ently figures crept fearfully into the moonlight from the matted ferns, gathering about the foreman.

Here one dragged an injured ankle, another stanched the blood from a ragged scalp with his hands, and there one wavered drunkenly from the fall he had got, but all eight accounted for themselves.

"Boys," said Daily tensely, "all who can swim get into the water quick! Sandry was standin' alone at her nose. It's a hundred to one he's done for!"

No one asked a question, the Indians accepting with their pathetic fatalism this disaster which would have set the tongues of white men flying.

Silently the five who were unharmed except for bruises slipped into the heavily running tidewater and disappeared amid the flotsam and jetsam of the long bay which traveled always aimlessly back and forth.

The groaning of the raft grew in volume for a few minutes, then subsided as it locked and settled. Daily on the shore began threshing the ferns, filling the night with his stentorian voice as he called upon Sandry's name. From time to time he listened. Then he lighted a torch and widened his circle, peering into every covert of fern, behind every log, and even searching the branches of the trees. He had seen the pines bear ghastly fruit a time or two when a blast of giant powder had gone wrong.

After a long time he straightened and his muddy face was blanched.

"Done for!" he said aloud to the dusk of the forest, bitterly. "Down an' done for—an' him so damned good for an Easterner!"

But even as he spoke a cry sounded from the water far ahead—another answered, another and another, as the Siletz drew in to each other somewhere out in the dim moonwash, and he knew they had found him.

So they had—a limp body lying bent back across a floating log, the pearl buttons on its breast shining and its

"Go Back to Ma Daily, Child."

hair dabbling in the water. They pushed the log with its burden in to shore and big John Daily, wading out, picked up his employer as a mother lifts a child, carried him back up the bank and bent to listen for life in the still breast. It was there. The timberman ran a great hand, experienced and gentle, over the sprawling arms.

"Busted!" he said bitterly, "legs too! He's crumpled like a broken tule! If I don't take ... is out of Hampden, I hope I'll burn in hell!"

He gathered the scattered blankets from bush and tree branch and laid the Easterner upon them. Then this simple son of the big country went off by himself into the shadows to think.

What should he do?

Here was his employer, this Easterner who was going through the ordeal by fire to win his right to live and fight in the wild land, and he was all but worsted, down and out. His life was not worth a copper—that coin of which the large West takes no notice—and far on the shores of the other ocean was that old father of whom he had told Daily in the quiet talks at night. It would take quick work to get Sandry to a doctor and word should be sent East at once

On the other hand, if Sandry should live and the contract had been lost his fight would be over. Those mortgages of which he had spoken vaguely would be foreclosed and the Dillingworth would become a thing of the past, the East Belt go by the board and Hampden would be supreme in the hills.

"No, by heaven, he'd want her to go through dead or alive, an' I'll see her there!" was Daily's ultimatum as he rose from the log in the pink flare of sunrise, and could he have known all that Sandry would lose with that contract and the Dillingworth his hatred of Hampden would have been deeper still, for Sandry was his friend.

He went back to the huddled Indians and the silent figure on its blankets.

"Memmiloo," he said decisively, "make quick a pole sling. You an' big Bill an' Multoowah an' Jim Pinetree will take Sandry back to camp. Go first to Toledo an' get Doc Hooker—have him do what he can there an' go along to camp. Tell him to stay with Sandry day an' night till I get back. Hurry now."

Without a word, the four Indians picked out by name set about their appointed task. In less time than a white man would take to begin they had laid clean saplings along blankets' edges, warped a short spreader at top and bottom to hold the poles the width of a man's shoulders apart, and the sling was ready.

"Now," said Daily grimly, "travel like hell, boys, but carry him soft, for he's broke like the ferns when a pine falls."

Tenderly they lifted the owner of the Dillingworth and laid him in the hollow of the blankets.

His foreman cast one look at him as the Indians swung away on the back trail and turned his face to the jammed raft. He studied the problem from all sides. Then he took his remaining Indians, for none of them were beyond work from their shaking-up, got off the mooring chains and snubbed the monster to the shore pines fore and aft. Then he calmly prepared to wait the turn of the tide She would loose herself.

The damage at the prow was slight. The lift had come a moment too soon to hurt the big raft much. Several of the binding chains at the extreme head of her had been broken, loosening the ends of the logs which slid downward and apart, giving her the appearance of a ragged broom.

Snamishta, like all the coast Indians, was a good waterman. He offered to dive for the broken chains and Daily let him go. In three hours he had found all the ends, fastened to them hauling lines, which the others used to bring them up, the breakage was repaired, and Daily was ready to mend the broken nose as well as he could. He needed to circle the loosened logs with the chains again, and he went about it in a simple manner.

There was no getting under the raft from the front because of the jam against the shore, even if Snamishta could have managed the tide and endured the time under water. Therefore it must be done from the other end.

So Daily laid the chains across the spreading nose, attached a long towline to the shore ends and dropped them into the water. The line was then led to the stern, under the mooring chains, around and forward to the prow.

He then lay down for a needed rest until the sucking green water grew slower and slower and finally stopped altogether.

With the first insidious movement of the flood tide the groaning and creaking set up again throughout the giant, and the foreman was on his feet at once as she began, almost imperceptibly, to back out from the shore. The ends of the chains were hauled up, slipped forward and fastened securely after the logs had been coaxed together as much as was possible with rope and peavey and cant hook.

"By jingo!" said Daily, "but that was a blast. The son-of-a-gun must have had a wagon-loan o' sticks. An' it was a 'plant,' all right. Must've had some batt'ries an' a trigger wire. But he hain't smart enough to figger out such things. Twa'n't th' right slant, or she'd a hit us amidships an' opened us up proper—an' we'd a-gone to sea in pieces."

The hours of the flood tide were irksome to him, waiting, wondering how it fared with Sandry swinging between the Indians, and thinking bitterly of Hampden, who was proving himself a dangerous enemy.

But he thought also of the steamer plowing down from Portland, which would stand in at Yaquina, and he knew he would be ready to turn over the raft in spite of all.

"Be a damn hard matter to tow by that head," he told himself; "guess we can drift her out an' turn her tail on."

Then he fell to wondering if Sandry would ever know of the big check, or if it would travel east with him to the old man in the wheeled chair on Riverside drive—mute evidence of the tenderfoot's first and last fight!

(To be continued.)